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THE TEACHING OF JESUS IN MARK'S GOSPEL

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We do not usually look to Mark's Gospel for the teaching of Jesus, but rather to Matthew, Luke, and John. In fact it is now almost a commonplace in New Testament criticism that Mark and Q (the Logia of Jesus) are the two main sources of Matthew and Luke. Maurice Jones regards this discovery as "the most notable achievement in the department of New Testament criticism."¹ Sanday says pointedly, "We assume what is commonly known as the 'Two-Document Hypothesis.'"² The document termed "Q" (*Quelle*, "Source") by criticism is represented by the non-Markan material common to Matthew and Luke. A good discussion of it appears in Harnack's *The Sayings of Jesus: The Second Source of St. Matthew and St. Luke* (trans., 1908). It is not yet settled how much Q contained. It was certainly mainly the discourses of Jesus with a minimum of narrative. The extent of Q is discussed by B. H. Streeter³ and C. S. Patton.⁴ It is held by some critics

that Mark was familiar with Q and made some use of it.⁵ Bacon is quite sure that the canonical Mark is embellished at points by the use of Q.⁶

However that may be, there is an undoubted contrast between the objectivity of Mark's narrative and the discourses in the other Gospels.

Neither Matthew nor Luke considers his task performed without embodying the substance of the sayings or teaching of the Lord. Matthew in particular regards it as the very essence of an evangelist's duty to "teach men to observe all things whatsoever Jesus had commanded." Mark certainly was not ignorant of such teaching or commandments of the Lord, even if we refuse his acquaintance with the particular document employed by Matthew and Luke. And yet he leaves his readers completely without information on the law of Jesus.⁷

We may admit that Mark was familiar with Q. He avoided using Q because that was already in use precisely as the Fourth Gospel mainly supplements the Synoptic Gospels. Stanton⁸

¹ *The New Testament in the Twentieth Century* (1914), p. 189.

² *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (1911), p. 2.

³ "The Original Extent of Q," *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, pp. 185-208.

⁴ *Sources of the Synoptic Gospels* (1915), pp. 97-122.

⁵ Cf. Streeter, "St. Mark's Knowledge and Use of Q," *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, pp. 165-84.

⁶ Bacon, *The Beginnings of the Gospel Story* (1909), p. xxi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

⁸ *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, II (1909), 109-14.

and Moffatt¹ deny that Mark made any use of Q. "Peter's teaching may have contained nearly all the sayings of Christ which are reported by Mark."² Swete says that "St. Mark does not write with a dogmatic purpose."³ Similarly Salmond says: "One of the most marked characteristics is the simple objectivity of the narrative. It is not the product of reflection, nor does it give things coloured by the writer's own ideas. It has been called a 'transcript from life' (Westcott)." And yet it will not do to say that Mark had no purpose and no plan in his Gospel. Bacon sees it and says: "His effort is simply to produce belief in his person as Son of God."⁴ Pfeiderer admits "a comparatively clearer and more naïve presentation of tradition" and "an earlier stage of apologetic authorship,"⁵ but he insists "that even this oldest Gospel writer is guided by a decided apologetic purpose in the selection and manifestation of material."⁶ Gould⁷ notes that in Mark's Gospel, Jesus is presented as a herald of the kingdom, then as a teacher with the note of authority, then as a prophet, then as a miracle worker, the Son of Man, and finally as the Messiah, the Son of God. "Now Mark's method begins to appear. Jesus does not lay down a programme of the Messianic Kingdom in a set discourse,

but the principles regulating his activity are slowly evolved by the occasions of his life." Gould is undoubtedly correct in this view of Mark's plan in his Gospel. Mark's Gospel proves the deity of Jesus mainly by the force of the work which he did. "But it is evident that Mark has grouped his material for a purpose. He wishes to show how, with one occasion after another, the teaching of our Lord acquired substance and shape and encountered a sharp and well-defined opposition."⁸

There is in Mark a minimum of teaching by Christ, but the teaching is present and is worth our study. Jesus is repeatedly called "teacher" (4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 12:14; 13:1). Bacon thinks that in Mark 8:27—10:52 "here at last we do find our evangelist giving the content of Jesus' message. . . . This Division of the Doctrine of the Cross is Mark's Sermon on the Mount."⁹ He attributes this portion to Paul's influence on Mark: "The Paulinism of Mark is supremely manifest in this evangelist's whole conception of what constitutes the apostolic message."¹⁰ Pfeiderer had already taken the same position and charges Mark with inventing these "Pauline" speeches and attributing them to Jesus. "The pupil of Paul is most evident in the speeches, which the evangelist did not find in his

¹ *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (1911), pp. 204-6.

² Plummer, "St. Mark," *Cambridge Bible for Schools* (1914), p. xxi.

³ *Commentary* (1898), p. lxxviii.

⁴ "Gospel of Mark" in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, p. xxvii.

⁵ *Christian Origins* (trans., 1906), p. 217.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁷ *International Critical Commentary* (1896), pp. xix-xx.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

⁹ *Beginnings of Gospel Story*, pp. xxvii f.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

source-book or in the Palestinian tradition, but created independently and for the first time fitted into the traditional material as the leading religious motives for the judgment of the history of Jesus."¹ Indeed Pfleiderer pointedly charges Mark with being partly responsible for theologizing the Jesus of history into the Christ of Paul. "Such a man might well have been the author of the Gospel which unites the Jesus of the Palestinian tradition, the energetic hero of a Jewish reform movement, with the Christ of the Pauline theology, the suffering hero of a mystical world-salvation, and thus paved the way which was finished two generations later in the Gospel of John."² It is quite to the point, therefore, since a purpose like that is attributed to Mark, to see what he really does represent Jesus as teaching.

The headline properly describes the book. It is "the Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." But it is the method of Jesus with which we are here concerned, not that of the gospel. "We must pause again to notice Mark's method, and to say now that it bears all the appearance of being the method of Jesus himself. He meets questions as they arise, instead of projecting discourse from himself. But the wisdom and completeness of his answer anticipate the controversies of Christendom."³ This is the method of Jesus in his teaching. He seized the occasions as they came to proclaim the message of the kingdom, now on this point, now on that. "It is their opportunity, but then it is Jesus' opportunity

too. It gives him his chance to strike at traditionalism and ceremonialism, the two foes of spiritual religion."⁴ But the teaching of Jesus is coherent and consistent in spite of its incidental occasion and aphoristic form. One has only to think of Socrates as reported by Plato and Xenophon to see how this can be true. Let us then turn to the sayings of Jesus in Mark and see what they teach us.

The first logion of Jesus is in 1:15 and reminds us of the message of the Baptist in 1:14. Like John, the Master announced the fulness of the time and the nearness of the Kingdom of God. We are not told what the word "kingdom" means in the mouth of Jesus, but the event shows that Jesus conceived it to be a spiritual reign in men's hearts, not the political rule looked for by the Pharisees. The duty of repentance was urged, a turning of the heart and life to God. Faith in the gospel was commended. Jesus had a definite message (the gospel) or good news, and he expected men to believe it. This saying of Jesus is the theme of the Galilean ministry.⁵

The next logion of Jesus is in 1:17. It is the call to Simon and Andrew to follow Jesus permanently, with the promise of making them "fishers of men," the only really "big business" in the world. The call caught the hearts of these two enterprising laymen and also won James and John, who left their business to go into the bigger task of winning men to Christ. The message of Jesus thus has point and

¹ *Christian Origins*, p. 220.

² *Ibid.*, p. 222.

³ Gould, "Mark," *International Critical Commentary*, p. xxv.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

⁵ Cf. Bruce, *The Galilean Gospel*.

force. It is public and personal. Jesus won these four followers by direct personal appeal. He claimed them and they acknowledged his authority. He drafted them for service.

The next logion is in 1:25 to the demon which Jesus commanded to come out of the poor man. Jesus here recognized the reality of demon possession and exercised his power over the evil spirit. The demon had addressed Jesus as "the Holy One of God," but Jesus commanded him to be silent, not wishing testimony from such a source. The demoniacs seemed to know that Jesus was the Son of God and loudly proclaimed it (cf. 5:7 f.).

The next saying is in 1:38 and concerns the purpose of Jesus to leave the crowds in Capernaum and push on to the next towns. Only one more incident comes in chapter 1, the healing of the leper, to whose pitiful appeal Jesus said, "I will; be thou made clean" (1:41), and then told the man to go and show himself to the priest (1:44). But these logia reveal Jesus as Lord and Master of men, as Teacher and Prophet, whose words and deeds had set Galilee ablaze.

In chapter 2 the teaching is more prominent. In fact, Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic before he healed him, and, when challenged, asserted his power to forgive sins and his consequent equality with God and proceeded to heal the man in order to prove that he possessed the right to forgive sins (2:5-11). This incident illustrates well how the teaching of Jesus in Mark's Gospel is associated with the actual events. The profoundest sayings of Christ burst forth spontaneously out

of the everyday work. Here Jesus revealed a consciousness of his equality with God quite Johannine in tone, and that was considered blasphemy by the scribes present. The use of the phrase "the Son of Man" is also characteristic. It is messianic in fact without giving his enemies a technical ground for arresting him. It also puts Jesus, though the Son of God, as the Father called him and as the demon understood (1:24; 5:7), on a level with men in sympathy and love as their representative and ideal.

In 2:17 we have one of the crisp parables of Jesus that throw a flood of light on himself and his enemies. The Pharisees posed as righteous and called other men sinners, as we know from the Psalms of the Pharisees. "Righteous" and "sinners" are here then class distinctions. Jesus does not mean to admit that the Pharisees are really righteous, but only that their claim to that class reflects their complaint at him for preaching to, and eating with, the publicans and sinners. It is a neat turn of unanswerable wit and is a complete justification for Christianity's mission to the so-called sinful classes. As a matter of fact, Pharisaic pride (cf. Matt., chap. 6) is one of the worst and most hopeless of sins.

In 2:19-22 Jesus is again on the defensive and justifies the conduct of his disciples in abstaining from one of the stated fasts which the disciples of John and the Pharisees were observing (2:18). The three parables (the Bridegroom, the Undressed Cloth, the Wine-skins) all show how radically Christianity differs from current Judaism (the Pharisaic orthodoxy). Jesus makes it plain that

Christianity has burst the swaddling-clothes of Jewish ceremonialism and can never again be put back into such bonds. And yet various types of Christianity have tried to put clamps upon the life of the spiritual man. Jesus here attacks sacramentarianism as a system, while commending fasting when it is the national expression of real grief, and not mere custom or display. Jesus also reveals foreknowledge of his approaching death and shows a messianic consciousness, calling himself "the bridegroom."

Few things irritated the Pharisees more than Christ's failure to observe their rules for sabbath observance. His defense against their attack made them more angry than ever by reason of his claim of superiority to these rules and even to the day itself as the Son of Man. Indeed he asserted that the day was for man's blessing, not for his injury (2:25-28). Jesus challenged the Pharisaic punctiliousness concerning the sabbath as slavery to the letter and a refusal to do good and willingness to let men die on that day (3:1). This attitude of Jesus widened the breach between him and the Pharisees and healed that between them and the Herodians, who joined hands plotting his death (3:5 f.).

In 3:22-30 Jesus not only defends himself against the charge of being in league with the devil by a series of brief parables, but also attacks the Pharisees with tremendous force and shows that they are guilty of an eternal sin which has no forgiveness, since they attribute to the devil the manifest work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus here denies universal salvation and proclaims eternal punish-

ment for some. In sharp contrast with this incident note the beautiful words of Jesus in 3:34 f., when he finds his mother and his brethren among those who do the will of God. This he said at the time when his own family supposed that he was beside himself and had come to take him home.

Chapter 4 is the parable chapter in Mark. We have only a few specimens of the many parables spoken on that day (4:2, 10, 33 f.). The parable of the Sower is given and explained by Jesus and shows the variety of hearers who hear the word that is spoken, as every preacher finds out to his sorrow. The place for the lamp is on the stand so as to give light. How careless men are with their opportunities. The mysterious growth of the kingdom in the heart is illustrated by the story of the seed growing of itself. The expanding power of the kingdom is shown by the mustard seed's development.

And yet with all the care in Christ's teaching the disciples were still fearful and timid in their faith when caught in the storm. The power of Christ over wind and wave amazed them (4:41), and shows that only gradually were they grasping the truth about Christ's person and mission. In 5:19 Jesus told the former demoniac to go home and tell his friends what great things God had done for him, whereas he told the leper not to tell (1:44). But this was in gentile territory where there was no danger of undue excitement, especially as Jesus was leaving the region. In Nazareth, Jesus revealed the fact that he knew how unable the people in his home town were to appreciate him at his real worth (6:4). The directions

that Jesus gave the Twelve for the Galilean tour were particular and special and not meant to apply to all mission campaigns (6:8-11).

The feeding of the five thousand was the occasion of much teaching (6:34), but Mark has not given it, probably because Peter did not tell it. However, the power of Christ is revealed in the miracle and in the walking on the water. Jesus taught the disciples how to face great problems and to be of cheer in time of stress and strain.

Chapter 7 gives one of the revolutionary discourses of Jesus when he accused the Pharisees of preferring tradition to truth and twitted them with their hypocritical practice of "Corban." The doctrine that, not ceremonial contaminations, but only the sinful thoughts of the heart really defile a man astonished even the disciples so much that they interviewed Jesus privately about it. Peter's amazement lasted till his experience on the housetop at Joppa (Acts, chap. 10), and Mark notes what Jesus said to the disciples "making all meats clean" (Mark 7:19). In 7:27 Jesus proclaims to the Syrophoenician woman the doctrine that the gospel comes to the Jew first. He tests her and then grants her request. Jesus knew that he was to be the Savior of the world, but the chosen people had the first privilege.

In 8:2 f. Christ shows his pity for the multitudes. For three days they have been with Jesus listening to his teaching. Now he desires to feed their stomachs as well as their souls, lest they faint on the way. It is good to use the kitchen as well as the pulpit, if one does not let the soup kitchen take the

place of the gospel. Christ first fed their hearts and then satisfied their hunger out of pity. We are prone to use hunger as a bit to entice men to hear the gospel.

Jesus had much to try his spirit. The captious criticism of his enemies made Christ refuse to perform signs to order, especially signs from heaven to conform on their theological implications about the messiahship (8:11 f.). The dulness of the disciples distressed Jesus greatly when they took his parable about the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod literally for actual bread (8:15 ff.), an absolutely jejune performance. Jesus took them to task sharply for intellectual inertness (8:17-21). Every teacher has his times of discouragement when it seems useless to go on. But better days come to us all, as they did to Jesus. Near Caesaria Philippi, Jesus tested his disciples concerning their opinion of him. People had various ideas of Jesus then, but Peter spoke up for the Twelve and said, "Thou art the Christ" (8:29). Jesus was pleased at the confession, though he urged them not to tell it publicly. John's Gospel shows that Jesus revealed himself to some as the Messiah at the beginning of his work. The public announcement of this fact, however, came at the end of his ministry and helped to precipitate the crisis, as Jesus foresaw it would. The value of the confession of the disciples "is in the fact that it is not their assent to his claim, but their estimate of his greatness. They, as Jews, had inherited an idea, an expectation of a man in whom human greatness would culminate. . . . The race has culminated in him, and he is

therefore the Messiah whom we are to expect."¹

Jesus had reached a crisis in his work, and the disciples are true to him even after the great Galilean defection. They are now in a position to be told the truth about the cross of Christ, his sacrificial death as the Savior from sin. "And he began to teach them many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (8:31). The time had come "and he spake the saying openly." A surgeon often probes deep enough to find inflammation where all seemed to be healed over. "And Peter took him and began to rebuke him." Peter could not bear to have Jesus interfere with his messianic theology by talking about his death. That to Peter spoiled everything, absolutely everything, for he still had the Pharisaic notion of a political Messiah and kingdom. The word of Jesus cut Peter to the quick: "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men" (8:33). Dazed as Peter was, it is doubtful if he grasped clearly the profound words of Jesus that followed concerning the philosophy of life and death, of finding life in death, and death in life. And yet he treasured them in his memory till he did understand them, and Mark wrote them down. One may gain the whole world and forfeit one's soul, like the madness of Alexander the Great, or Napoleon, or the Kaiser. The Son of Man is the judge of this world and will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of him (8:38). The words of

Jesus in 9:1 have puzzled many. What does Jesus mean by those still living who would see the Kingdom of God come with power? His own resurrection, Pentecost, the destruction of Jerusalem, the second coming? Each view has its difficulties. We have come upon the eschatology of Jesus, a theme that bristles with difficulties. Schweitzer² makes eschatology the chief thing in the teaching of Jesus. He is thus a mere apocalyptic dreamer with only "interim" ethics and no world-program. Sanday answers this one-sided view well in his *The Life of Christ in Recent Research* (1907). See further, Dobschütz, *The Eschatology of the Gospels* (1910); Muirhead, *The Eschatology of Jesus* (1904); Jackson, *The Eschatology of Jesus* (1913); Oesterley, *The Apocalypse of Jesus* (1912); Winstanley, *Jesus and the Future* (1913); Worsley, *The Apocalypse of Jesus* (1912). We are face to face with the question whether Jesus had adopted the cataclysmic view of the current Jewish apocalyptists and expected a sudden demonstration of power that never came and a personal return within that generation. In a word, we are asked to believe that Jesus was grievously mistaken in the very thing concerning which he claimed superior knowledge, viz., the Kingdom of God. He did use apocalyptic imagery, as in chapter 13, the so-called "Little Apocalypse," the Sermon on the Mount of Olives, in which he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and finally the end of the world. The language is symbolic and highly figurative, but Jesus expressly disclaims knowledge of the time of the

¹ Gould, "Mark," *International Critical Commentary*, p. xxvi.

² *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1910, trans.

end of the world (13:32), and that makes us wonder if he can have that idea in mind in 9:1 and in 13:30. We have not reached the end of this debate, but the eschatological side of Christ's teaching in the apocalyptic form must not be made the major thing in his teaching to the neglect of the ethical and clearly spiritual notes which we can understand.

We have no word from Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, but he manifests keen disappointment at the failure of the disciples to cure the epileptic boy while he was on the mountain (9:19), and tells the father that faith is the door to all power (9:23)—faith and prayer (9:29), which the disciples had omitted, obvious explanation of much failure today on the part of workers for Christ.

The time drew nearer when Jesus must make plain the fact of his coming death (9:30-32). Not only did the disciples not understand his teaching on this point, but apparently took no interest in it, for they were bent on settling their own rank so as to be ready for the chief places in the political kingdom which they expected the Messiah to set up (9:33-37). Jesus made service the test of greatness and childlikeness the mark of discipleship. The rebuke of John's narrowness is pertinent today when men are often overzealous about punctilios, and partisanship overtops loyalty to Christ.

The position of Christ on marriage and divorce is challenged by many today as then. Easy divorce has always been popular in times of loose living. Mark (10:5-12) does not give the one ground for divorce found in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9, and Mark quotes Christ as forbidding wives to divorce their hus-

bands. Only Jewish women of prominence could do that, women like Salome, Herod's sister, and Herodias. Christ's love for little children is shown by his tender words in 10:14 ff., and his love for a young man in the grip of a great sin appears in 10:21. Jesus spoke plainly about the terrible power of money over men's lives (10:23-31). His words amazed Peter and the rest, but in these days of war-profiteering and national land-grabbing it is easy enough to see the point.

The plain prediction of the death of Jesus still failed to impress the disciples, for James and John came right up to ask for the chief places in the kingdom. But at least we get from the incident the profound words of Jesus concerning his atoning death as the crowning illustration of devoted service for others (10:32-45), words whose depth we still cannot fathom.

Faith made blind Bartimaeus whole, Jesus said (10:52), and faith can remove mountains still (11:23-25), faith coupled with the forgiving spirit. Jesus purposely proclaimed himself Messiah by the triumphal entry, and claimed messianic power in cleansing the Temple (11:17). Nowhere does the mastery of Christ stand out more clearly than in the wonderful debate on the Tuesday of Passion Week, when Jesus routed his enemies in a series of attacks in the Temple (11:27-44). Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Sanhedrin, and students, all went down before the storm and fury of Christ's withering words. The more they winced, the more the common people rejoiced, and Christ remained the master-teacher of the Temple, to the rage of his foes.

The eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives (chap. 13) followed on that same afternoon, with its wondrous picture of the woes impending upon Jerusalem and the warning against that day of doom and the remote judgment of the world. The apocalyptic language symbolizes the power of Christ, and the pictures flashed upon the dark background like the play of lightning on the storm clouds. We falter as we seek to interpret these symbols, but we must not rob them of all pith and point.

Mary of Bethany alone showed insight concerning Christ's death, and he defended her deed in words of immortal sympathy that angered Judas and spurred him on to make his hellish compact with the puzzled ecclesiastics (14:1-11). But Jesus did not hesitate to point out the betrayer during the last Passover meal, though the rest seem not to have grasped the signal (14:12-21). The words of Christ in the institution of the Supper plainly show that Christ was conscious of the sacrificial aspect of his atoning death for the sins of men (14:22-25). The warning to Peter brought only boasting (14:27-31), and the privilege of watching with Christ in his agony in the garden found the chosen three inert in body and unable to keep awake while the Son of Man writhed on the ground with the load of

the sins of mankind. The cry for help to the Father was wrung from the broken, but not rebellious, heart of God's Son, who submitted wholly to the Father's will (14:32-40). Jesus meets his betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion with an air of innocence and of triumph (14:41-15:37). He is fully aware that he has voluntarily surrendered his life for the life of men, and his courage to the end is not really marred by the cry of loneliness after three hours of darkness, when he felt so keenly that the Father had withdrawn for the moment his conscious presence (15:34). Jesus on oath before the Sanhedrin claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God (14:61 f.), but he also claimed that, though they killed him, he would come in glory on the clouds and judge the whole earth.

Thus it will be seen that, while Mark's Gospel does give only occasional sayings of Christ in connection with the historical occasions that called them forth, it in no wise gives a "reduced" Christianity. These extracts have the same flavor that we find in Matthew, Luke, John, and Paul. The "samples" prove the quality of the whole. The teaching of Jesus in Mark's Gospel is clear and consistent concerning the Father, the Son, sin, salvation, the kingdom, and the moral regeneration of men.